

VIRGIN MOUNTAIN INSTANT STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 6,560 acres

Virgin Mountain Instant Study Area (ISA) is located approximately 4 miles south of Mesquite, Nevada, in a portion of the Virgin Mountains. The ISA boundary is the same as the Virgin Mountain Natural Area which encompasses 6,560 acres of BLM land.

The western boundary of the ISA extends along the Section line from the northwest corner of Section 24 to the southwest corner of Section 25, T. 15S., R. 70E. The southern boundary extends along the Section lines from the southwest corner of Section 25, T. 15S., R. 70E. to the southeast corner of Section 27, T. 15S., R. 71E. The eastern boundary extends along the Nevada/Arizona State line from the southeast corner of Section 27 to the northeast corner of Section 22, T. 15S., R. 71E. The northern boundary bears west from the northeast corner of Section 22 to the northwest corner of Section 21, T. 15S., R. 71E. then north one-quarter mile to the northeast corner of the south one-half of the south one-half of Section 17, T. 15S., R. 71E. The northern boundary then continues west to the northwest corner of the south one-half of the south one-half of Section 17, T. 15S., R. 71E. then south to the northwest corner of Section 20, T. 15S., R. 71E. The northern boundary then bears west from the northwest corner of Section 20, T. 15S., R. 71E. to the northwest corner of Section 24, T. 15S., R. 70E.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 0 acres recommended for wilderness 6,560 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this ISA is to not designate it wilderness but to release all 6,560 acres for uses other than wilderness, primarily because of a lack of wilderness character.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The area does not appear natural due to mining related activity, access roads, ways, trails, and extensive range improvements in the form of cattle guards, earthen dams, pipelines, and water troughs. These intrusions tend to dominate the area. Although this area appears to lack wilderness character, it should be looked at as a possible Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

B. Solitude: The topography consists of steep canyon walls, ridges, and jagged rock outcrops at the highest elevations. These characteristics offer areas of outstanding screening properties. A wide variety of vegetative species including creosote, black brush, yucca species, oak species, manzanita, pinyon pine, juniper, ponderosa pine, white fir, Arizona cypress, and Douglas fir can be found throughout the study area. Where height and density is sufficient to provide the necessary screening, outstanding opportunities for solitude can be found.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: The ISA provides opportunities for hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, hunting, nature studies, camping and sightseeing. Traveling from the lower elevations to the top of the Virgin Mountains gives the hiker an opportunity to experience a variety of environments, topographic features, scenic views, and physical challenges. Excellent scenic views, both within the ISA and panoramas of the outlying country, are provided. The sweeping panorama from the top of the Virgin Peak Ridge provides a magnificent view of the outlying deserts and mountains.

D. Special Features: The area contains signs of early man in the form of lithic scatter, shelter caves, petroglyphs, and campsites. Ecological, geological, and other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value can be found. The scenic Virgin Peak Ridge, reaching an elevation of 6,650 feet is characterized by pinyon/juniper forests, exposed rock formations, rugged topography, and springs.

4. MANAGEABILITY

Due to its location, the study area is capable of being managed as wilderness. Because the perimeter of the ISA is located on Section lines, the boundary can not be easily identified.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

6. SUMMARY OF ISA SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Of the 11 comment letters received, 4 supported designation of the Virgin Mountains ISA as wilderness and 7 were opposed to designation. The primary reason for opposition to wilderness designation was interference with mineral development.